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Emergency Preparedness, Response,
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Representatives

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CIVIL SUPPORT

DOD Is Taking Action to Strengthen Support of Civil Authorities

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GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-686T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Threats to the homeland and major disasters and emergencies, such as hurricanes and wildfires, are frequently unpredictable or occur with little or no notice. DOD is often expected to play a prominent role supporting civil authorities and must be prepared to provide rapid response when called upon during disasters and declared emergencies (both natural and man-made). DOD also must provide support for restoring public health and services and civil order; support for national special security events; and periodic planned support. DOD provides this support to the American people through its defense support of civil authorities mission.

In this statement, GAO describes progress DOD has made in implementing recommendations to strengthen (1) DOD's strategy, plans, and guidance; (2) interagency coordination; and, (3) capabilities to support civil authorities. This testimony is primarily based on GAO products issued from March 2010 through December 2014 that examined DOD's support of civil authorities mission. In June 2015 GAO obtained selected updates about DOD's support of civil authorities mission.

What GAO Recommends

GAO previously made recommendations to help DOD address management challenges or gaps in guidance regarding support of civil authorities. In response, the agency has taken some steps and plans to do more.

View [GAO-15-686T](#). For more information, contact Joseph Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or kirschbaumj@gao.gov.

June 10, 2015

CIVIL SUPPORT

DOD Is Taking Action to Strengthen Support of Civil Authorities

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken action to address GAO's prior recommendations to strengthen its strategy, plans and guidance for support of civil authorities. As GAO has reported, clear, current, and complete strategies, plans, and guidance are important for reflecting the direction of the department's leadership, defining DOD policies and responsibilities, and sharing practices that could facilitate effective support of civil authorities. In October 2012, GAO found DOD had not developed guidance for the use of dual-status commanders (active-duty military or National Guard officers who were authorized to command both state and federal personnel) for incidents affecting multiple states and territories. For example, DOD had no specific criteria and conditions for when and how state governors and the Secretary of Defense would mutually appoint a commander. In September 2013, GAO found that DOD did not have a clear command-and-control structure for managing complex catastrophes across multiple states because DOD had not identified roles, responsibilities, and relationships among command elements. GAO recommended in both reports that DOD update and implement better guidance. DOD has partially addressed GAO's recommendations by updating its strategy and guidance, and the department is drafting an instruction on dual-status commanders.

DOD also has taken action to address GAO's prior recommendations to strengthen the department's interagency coordination. It is critical that DOD coordinate and synchronize its civil support mission to engage with a broad range of interagency partners it may need to support, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Customs and Border Protection. Previously, GAO reported on three areas DOD can focus on to enhance interagency coordination: clearly define roles and responsibilities, communicate DOD's approach toward interagency partners, and implement key practices for managing liaisons with partners. GAO found that roles and responsibilities for support to law enforcement—including Joint Task Force-North, which provides civil support along U.S. borders—were unclear. GAO also found that DOD did not have complete situational awareness of 110 liaisons detailed to the Department of Homeland Security headquarters. To improve interagency coordination, GAO recommended that DOD issue and update civil-support guidance. Subsequently, DOD addressed GAO's recommendations by issuing guidance and other documents, such as the 2011 Interagency Partner Guide.

Additionally, DOD has taken action to address GAO's prior recommendations to improve its identification of capabilities for support of civil authorities. In the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, DOD notes that the key pillar of protecting the homeland includes sustaining capabilities to assist U.S. civil authorities. In 2013, GAO found two combatant commands had not identified civil-support capabilities because they were waiting until FEMA completed planning efforts in 2018. GAO recommended that DOD develop an interim set of specific capabilities that could be provided to prepare for and respond to complex catastrophes. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation and DOD officials reported as of June 2015 that Northern Command and Pacific Command had updated their plans to incorporate complex catastrophes, including identifying capabilities that would be available to the lead federal agency during such an event.

Chairman McSally, Ranking Member Payne, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss progress and challenges in the Department of Defense's (DOD) efforts to serve the American people through its defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) mission.¹ The United States continues to face an uncertain, complex security environment with the potential for major disasters and emergencies, such as Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The 2013 *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities* recognizes DOD is often expected to play a prominent role supporting civil authorities and must be prepared to provide rapid response when called upon.² DOD must coordinate with a number of other agencies on its civil support mission, which include providing support during disasters and declared emergencies (both natural and man-made); providing support for restoring public health and services and civil order; providing support for national special security events; and periodic planned support. Examples of such DOD coordination with civil authorities include aiding the identification and interdiction of suspected transnational criminal organizations' activities conducted within and along the approaches to the continental United States; assisting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the annual hurricane season; assisting the Department of Transportation after the I-35 bridge collapse in Minnesota in 2007; and supporting the U.S. Secret Service regarding Presidential inaugurations. In these and other events, DOD offered a broad array of resources that were developed for its warfighting mission but were brought to bear when civilian-response capabilities were overwhelmed or exhausted—or in instances where DOD offered unique capabilities.

In an effort to facilitate defense support of civil authorities across the nation and at all organizational levels, DOD has assigned responsibilities within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global

¹Defense support of civil authorities is support provided by federal military forces, DOD civilians, DOD contract personnel, DOD component assets, and, in certain circumstances, National Guard forces in response to requests for assistance from civil authorities for domestic emergencies, law enforcement support, and other domestic activities, or from qualifying entities for special events.

²DOD, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities* (February 2013).

Security),³ the Joint Chiefs of Staff, various combatant commands (such as Northern Command and Pacific Command), the National Guard Bureau, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Defense Logistics Agency, joint task forces (such as Joint Task Force-North),⁴ the intelligence agencies (such as the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency), and regional interagency liaisons (such as the Defense Coordinating Officers and Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officers).⁵

My testimony is based on reports we issued from March 2010 through December 2014 that examined DOD's DSCA mission, and discusses DOD's progress in implementing recommendations that we made to strengthen (1) DOD's strategy, plans, and guidance documents; (2) interagency coordination; and, (3) capabilities to support civil authorities.⁶

³In January 2015, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy reorganized its missions and renamed the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas' Security Affairs as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security. For the purpose of consistency, we will refer to the position in this report as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense.

⁴Joint Task Force-North, formerly referred to as Joint Task Force-6, was created in 1989 to serve as the planning and coordinating operational headquarters to support local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies within the southwest border region to counter the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the command was officially renamed Joint Task Force-North and its mission was expanded to include providing homeland security support to the nation's federal law enforcement agencies.

⁵A Defense Coordinating Officer is a DOD single point of contact for domestic emergencies who is assigned to a joint field office to validate requests for assistance, forward mission assignments through proper channels to the appropriate military organizations, and assign military liaisons, as appropriate, to activated emergency support functions. An Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer is a senior reserve officer who represents their service at the appropriate joint field office conducting planning and coordination responsibilities in support of civil authorities. See Joint Publication 3-28, *Defense Support to Civil Authorities* (Jul. 31, 2013).

⁶This statement is based on the following reports that are cited throughout and include GAO, *Emergency Preparedness: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Interagency Assessments and Accountability for Closing Capability Gaps*, [GAO-15-20](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 4, 2014); *Civil Support: Actions Are Needed to Improve DOD's Planning for a Complex Catastrophe*, [GAO-13-763](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 30, 2013); *Homeland Defense: DOD Needs to Address Gaps in Homeland Defense and Civil Support Guidance*, [GAO-13-128](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 24, 2012); *Homeland Defense: DOD Can Enhance Efforts to Identify Capabilities to Support Civil Authorities during Disasters*, [GAO-10-386](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 30, 2010); and, *Homeland Defense: DOD Needs to Take Actions to Enhance Interagency Coordination for Its Homeland Defense and Civil Support Missions*, [GAO-10-364](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 30, 2010).

This statement includes selected updates that we conducted in June 2015 on DOD's DSCA mission. Our reports contained information that we obtained from reviewing and analyzing relevant DOD documents, including the 2013 *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities*; *The DOD Cyber Strategy* from 2015; Northern Command and Pacific Command planning documents; DOD directives, instructions, and doctrine; and Northern Command capability assessments. We also conducted interviews with DOD officials within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, combatant commands, military services, defense agencies, and Reserve officials. We also conducted interviews with other federal officials from organizations such as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), FEMA, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Agency, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and officials located in the El Paso Intelligence Center. More detailed information about our scope and methodology can be found in our reports. For the updates, we collected information from DOD officials on actions the department has taken to address findings and recommendations made in our prior reports. The work upon which this testimony is based was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

DOD Continues to Take Action to Strengthen Its DSCA Strategy, Plans, and Guidance

DOD has and continues to take action to address our prior recommendations to strengthen its DSCA strategy, plans, and guidance. As we have previously reported, clear, current, and complete strategies, plans, and guidance documents are important for reflecting the direction of the departments' civilian and military leadership, defining DOD and its components' policies and responsibilities, and sharing practices that could facilitate effective support of civil authorities. In 2005, DOD issued its first *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*.⁷ In four reports we issued in 2010 through 2013, we found that DOD's DSCA strategies and guidance were outdated, not fully integrated, or were not

⁷DOD, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support* (June 2005).

comprehensive.⁸ Since 2010, DOD has taken action to address many of our findings and recommendations. For example:

- **DOD updated its strategy and doctrine for civil support.** In 2010, and then again in 2012, we found that DOD's 2005 *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support* had not been updated to reflect the current environment in which DOD supports civil authorities. For example, while the strategy primarily discusses DOD's DSCA mission in the context of the department's response to a weapon of mass destruction—DOD's primary focus after the 2001 terrorist attacks—it did not address the breadth of DSCA missions that DOD must be prepared to support subsequent to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Based on our recommendation that DOD should update its strategy, in February 2013 DOD issued an updated *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities*. In this update, DOD acknowledged that national security threats, hazards, vulnerabilities, strategic guidance, and political and economic factors had evolved since the 2005 strategy, and recognized that its support to civil authorities included a broader set of missions—to include catastrophic natural or man-made disasters, pre-planned National Special Security Events (like summits and high-profile sports events), cyberattacks, and the southwest border counterdrug efforts. We also reported in 2012 that DOD had not updated its joint publication for DSCA and recommended that the department needed to do so. DOD agreed with our recommendation and in July 2013, DOD updated its joint publication for Defense Support for Civil Authorities.⁹ In this update, among other things, DOD described more fully the *National Response Framework*, which is a framework based on a tiered, graduated response to major disasters and emergencies where incidents are

⁸GAO-13-763, GAO-13-128, GAO-10-364, and GAO-10-386.

⁹Joint Publication 3-28, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities*, (July 31, 2013).

managed at the lowest jurisdictional level and are supported by additional response capabilities, as needed.¹⁰

- **DOD has reported that it has updated its DSCA plans.** In September 2013,¹¹ we found that DOD did not have a clear command-and-control structure for federal military services during complex catastrophes.¹² We found that DOD had not identified the roles, responsibilities, and relationships among command elements that may be involved in responding to such incidents across multiple states. This issue was illustrated by events such as National Level Exercise 2011 that examined DOD's response to a complex catastrophe. Similarly, DOD's after-action reports on Hurricane Sandy in 2012 found that the command-and-control structure for federal military forces was not clearly defined, resulting in the degradation of situational awareness and unity of effort, and the execution of missions without proper approval. Northern Command officials agreed with our findings and stated that they would address this issue and the associated recommendation we made in our report by updating their DSCA plans. As of June 2015, DOD reported that Northern Command and Pacific Command had updated their DSCA plans to address our recommendation.
- **DOD implementation guidance on the use of dual-status commanders is in development.** DOD established the dual-status commander structure—active-duty military or National Guard officers who command state and federal responses to civil-support incidents

¹⁰The *National Response Framework* is a guide to how the nation responds to all types of disasters and emergencies. It is built on scalable, flexible, and adaptable concepts identified in the National Incident Management System to align key roles and responsibilities across the nation. This framework describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from the serious but purely local to large-scale terrorist attacks or catastrophic natural disasters. The *National Response Framework* describes the principles, roles and responsibilities, and coordinating structures for delivering the core capabilities required to respond to an incident and further describes how response efforts integrate with those of the other mission areas.

¹¹[GAO-13-763](#).

¹²DOD has defined a complex catastrophe as a natural or man-made incident, including cyberspace attack, power grid failure, and terrorism, which results in cascading failures of multiple interdependent, critical, life-sustaining infrastructure sectors and causes extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the population, environment, economy, public health, national morale, response efforts, and/or government functions.

and events—and has used this structure for certain events.¹³ For example, DOD used the dual-status commander structure for the 2012 Colorado wildfire response and the Hurricane Sandy response. In October 2012, we reported that DOD had not developed guidance for the use of dual-status commanders for incidents affecting multiple states and territories.¹⁴ For example, DOD had not developed specific criteria and conditions for when and how state governors and the Secretary of Defense would mutually appoint a commander. Consequently, we recommended and DOD concurred that the department develop implementation guidance on the use of dual-status commanders. In June 2015, Northern Command officials reported that an instruction about dual-status commanders was being drafted in coordination with DOD, Northern Command, and the National Guard Bureau.

- **DOD has agreed to take steps to align cyber-support roles and responsibilities.** In October 2012, we found that DOD had not updated its DSCA guidance, such as joint doctrine, to ensure that it was consistent with national plans and preparations for domestic cyber incidents.¹⁵ We recommended that DOD align guidance on preparing for and responding to domestic cyber incidents with national-level guidance to include roles and responsibilities. DOD partially concurred with this recommendation. However, the department has not yet taken action that meets the intent of the recommendation.

¹³Dual-status commanders are military commanders who serve as an intermediate link between the separate chains of command for state and federal forces.

¹⁴[GAO-13-128](#).

¹⁵[GAO-13-128](#).

DOD Has Taken Action to Strengthen Interagency Coordination for Support of Civil Authorities

DOD has and continues to take action to address our prior recommendations to strengthen the department's interagency coordination for support of civil authorities. As numerous events within the homeland in the last decade have pointed out, it is critical that DOD coordinate, integrate, and synchronize its DSCA mission with a broad range of interagency partners that the department may need to support. Such partners can include FEMA, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Customs and Border Protection, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As we have previously reported, there are three key areas that DOD needs to focus on to enhance and institutionalize its interagency coordination efforts. DOD has since taken action to address these areas:

- **DOD has better defined interagency roles and responsibilities.** Previous GAO work, the *National Response Framework*, and DOD strategic guidance identify the need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities to enhance interagency coordination.¹⁶ In our 2010 review of DOD's interagency coordination efforts, we found that the key documents used to define roles and responsibilities were outdated, not fully integrated, or were not comprehensive.¹⁷ We found that DOD's series of civil-support policies and guidance, such as a 1997 DOD directive on military assistance to civil authorities,¹⁸ were outdated and did not reflect changes that occurred subsequent to their issuance. For example, the guidance documents did not refer to DHS, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, Northern Command, or roles and responsibilities under the *National Response Framework*. Similarly, we found that roles and responsibilities for support to law enforcement—including Joint Task Force-North, which provides defense support of civilian law enforcement agencies along U.S. borders—were unclear as were the roles and responsibilities between the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense. Consequently, we recommended and DOD

¹⁶DHS, *National Response Framework, Second Edition* (May 2013); DOD, Joint Publication 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations* (June 24, 2011); [GAO-10-364](#); DOD, *National Defense Strategy* (June 2008); and GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

¹⁷[GAO-10-364](#).

¹⁸DOD Directive 3025.15, *Military Assistance to Civil Authorities* (Feb. 18, 1997).

concurred that the department should update key documents that outline roles and responsibilities. Subsequently, DOD has, for the most part, issued new guidance documents or updated older guidance to better define roles and responsibilities within the department for interagency coordination.

- **DOD has issued an interagency partner guide.** DOD's joint doctrine on interagency coordination and support of civil authorities notes that a unified "whole-of-government" approach to national security issues requires federal partner agencies to understand core competencies, roles, and missions and that sharing information is critical for the success of interagency coordination between federal agencies.¹⁹ To support interagency coordination on DSCA, DOD has taken action to communicate with its federal partners through conferences and other forums and multiple documents. In our 2010 review of DOD's interagency coordination efforts, we found that DOD's approach to communicating with federal partners could be improved, and the department had not clearly identified the roles and responsibilities and day-to-day coordination processes with its federal partners through a single, readily accessible source.²⁰ Specifically, DOD, DHS, and the Department of Justice officials told us that the benefits gained through interagency forums, such as Homeland Security Council meetings and annual National Interagency Fire Center conferences, are transient because they depend on personnel who rotate out of their positions frequently. The National Interagency Fire Center had addressed this challenge by creating a partner handbook that identified key information. DOD had not developed a similar vehicle for institutionalizing its information sharing efforts so that federal partners could maintain knowledge and have readily accessible information about key issues, such as the different DOD entities that have DSCA missions. For those cases where DOD internally documented its missions, roles, and responsibilities, we found the information was dispersed among multiple sources; also, the documents may not have always been readily accessible to federal partners, and they may have been written in a manner that led to unclear expectations. Therefore, we recommended that DOD

¹⁹ Joint Publication 3-28, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities* (July 31, 2013); and Joint Publication 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations* (June 24, 2011).

²⁰ [GAO-10-364](#).

develop and issue a partner guide that identifies the roles and responsibilities of DOD entities, processes, and agreed-upon approaches for interagency coordination for homeland defense and civil-support efforts. DOD concurred with our recommendation and, in November 2011, issued its *Defense Support of Civil Authorities Interagency Partner Guide*.

- **DOD has taken action to implement key practices for managing some liaisons the department exchanges with its federal partners.** Prior GAO reports and DOD guidance recognize that leading organizations employ key practices for effective and efficient workforce planning, such as situational awareness, staffing-needs assessments, position descriptions, training, and performance assessments.²¹ However, in our 2010 report, we found that DOD had not implemented such key practices.²² For example, DOD did not have complete situational awareness of all the liaisons detailed to its interagency partners. According to DOD records, in 2009, there were only 2 DOD personnel at DHS headquarters—yet an informal survey by the representative for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense to DHS found that more than 110 DOD personnel, from a variety of DOD entities, were working at DHS as liaisons, subject-matter experts, or in other capacities.²³ Therefore, we recommended and DOD agreed that DOD develop and issue additional workforce management policy and guidance regarding DOD liaisons to other federal agencies, as well as other federal agencies' liaisons to DOD. In October 2013, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security

²¹DOD Instruction 1315.18, *Procedures for Military Personnel Assignments* (Jan. 12, 2005); DOD Instruction 1400.25, *DOD Civilian Personnel Management System* (Nov. 18, 2008); DOD Instruction 1000.17, *Detail of DOD Personnel to Duty Outside the Department of Defense* (Apr. 16, 2008); GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, [GAO-04-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003; and GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, [GAO-02-373SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002).

²²[GAO-10-364](#).

²³In responding to a draft of this statement, DOD stated that, according to a 2004 DOD-DHS memorandum of agreement on personnel exchange, there were at least 38 DOD personnel detailed to (or assigned as liaisons at) DHS headquarters and 86 DoD personnel to DHS, in general. However, during the audit, DOD documents and officials reflect that DOD's numbers were inaccurate and that the officials did not have an exact count on the number of DOD personnel located at DHS headquarters or throughout the DHS organization.

signed an updated memorandum of agreement that outlines ways in which DOD and DHS will incorporate key practices for managing liaisons in the national capital region.

DOD Has Taken Action to Identify Needs and Address Capability Gaps Regarding Its Support of Civil Authorities

In response to our prior recommendations, DOD has taken action to identify needs and address capability gaps for its DSCA mission. In the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, DOD notes that the key pillar of protecting the homeland includes sustaining capabilities to assist U.S. civil authorities in protecting U.S. airspace, shores, and borders, and in responding effectively to domestic man-made and natural disasters.²⁴ In 2008, DOD conducted a capabilities-based assessment of its homeland defense and civil support missions to enable improvements for DOD homeland defense and civil-support policy, evaluate existing DOD capabilities and identify capability gaps, improve DOD's integration with interagency mission partners, and recommend further action to promote future capability development. In 2010, we found that DOD and DHS had undertaken initiatives to address gaps in strategic planning that should assist DOD in identifying its capability requirements for the DSCA mission.²⁵ For example, DOD and DHS issued catastrophic plans for responding to and recovering from a category 4 hurricane in Hawaii. In addition, DHS had established a pilot initiative entitled Task Force for Emergency Readiness pilot initiative that sought to integrate federal and state planning efforts for catastrophic events, which in turn would assist DOD in determining the capabilities it may be asked to provide. However, we found that DOD's DSCA policy and guidance was outdated, which limited DOD's ability to address capability gaps. We therefore made a recommendation and DOD concurred that the department should update its DSCA guidance. Since then, DOD has updated or replaced several DSCA guidance documents, such as DOD Directive 3025.18.²⁶ By updating this guidance, DOD addressed our recommendation and DOD is in a better position to address remaining capability gaps.

²⁴DOD, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Mar. 4, 2014).

²⁵[GAO-10-386](#).

²⁶DOD Directive 3025.18, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities* (DSCA) (Dec. 29, 2010, incorporating change 1, Sep. 21, 2012).

Additionally, we found in 2013 that DOD had not taken all of the necessary steps to identify capabilities for DSCA.²⁷ Specifically, we found that Northern Command and Pacific Command were updating their DSCA plans to include a scenario for a complex catastrophe; however, the commands delayed identification of capabilities that could be provided to execute the plans in light of FEMA's plan to complete its regional planning efforts in 2018. We recommended that the commanders work through the defense coordinating officers to develop an interim set of specific capabilities that could be provided to prepare for and respond to complex catastrophes while FEMA completes its plans. DOD concurred with our recommendation and, in May 2014, according to DOD officials, Northern Command and Pacific Command had updated their plans to incorporate complex catastrophes, including identifying capabilities that would be available to the lead federal agency during such an event. Specifically, DOD officials told us, in June 2015, that planning had been completed, covering issues such as complex catastrophes; wildland firefighting; and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear response. Additionally, DOD officials told us that future planning efforts will include additional branch plans addressing issues such as pandemic influenza and infectious diseases and civil disturbance operations.

Under the *National Response Framework*, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers serves as the coordinator for the 'Public Works and Engineering' emergency support function—1 of 14 emergency support functions that serve as the federal government's primary coordinating structure for building, sustaining, and delivering response capabilities.²⁸ The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in its emergency support function coordinator role, is responsible for engaging in appropriate planning and preparedness activities, which could include establishing capability requirements, cataloguing current capabilities, and conducting capability gap analyses that might be needed if the federal government is asked to

²⁷GAO-13-763.

²⁸The *National Response Framework* states that the Secretary of Homeland Security is to ensure that overall federal preparedness actions are unified, complete, and synchronized to prevent unfilled gaps or seams in the federal government's efforts to respond to all hazards. The emergency support functions are organized by specific functional areas for the most frequently needed capabilities during an emergency—including communications, medical services, and search and rescue—and are designed to coordinate the provision of related assets and services by federal departments and agencies. See DHS, *National Response Framework, Second Edition (May 2013)*.

support local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area government response operations during a disaster. In a recent assessment of the federal preparedness to respond to no-notice catastrophic disasters, such as improvised nuclear device attacks and major earthquakes, we found that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had taken an insular approach to identifying, cataloguing, and analyzing gaps for public works and engineering capabilities.²⁹ Since we concluded that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' actions—as well as actions by other non-DOD agencies that serve as coordinators for different emergency support functions—were attributable to unclear guidance, and recommended that FEMA issue supplemental guidance to the agencies that serve as coordinators for the different emergency support functions.³⁰ FEMA concurred with this recommendation and estimated that it would complete this supplemental guidance by June 30, 2015.

In conclusion, threats to the homeland and major disasters and emergencies, such as cyber attacks and earthquakes, frequently are unpredictable or occur with little or no notice. DOD's 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* emphasizes protecting the homeland, including deterring and defeating attacks on the United States and supporting civil authorities in mitigating the effects of potential attacks and natural disasters, as the first of the defense strategy's three pillars. DOD has made significant progress in improving strategy, plans, and guidance; interagency coordination; and capabilities needed for DSCA. Our work also shows that there remains room for improvement and that DOD recognizes this and intends to fully address the remaining recommendations from our prior reports. We continue to believe that their implementation will buttress the advanced planning and interagency coordination effort DOD requires to support civil authorities in responding to the myriad threats and challenges we face. On that note, looking ahead, we will continue to monitor and evaluate (1) DOD's cyber civil support, (2) the status of the homeland response forces, (3) DOD's preparedness for civil support in the event of a pandemic, and (4) coordination with federal agencies to counter improvised explosive devices in the United States.

²⁹GAO-15-20.

³⁰FEMA serves as the chair of the Emergency Support Function Leadership Group.

Chairman McSally, Ranking Member Payne, and members of the subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this statement, please contact me at (202) 512-9971 or kirschbaumj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this statement include Tommy Baril (Assistant Director), Jennifer Andreone, Gina Flacco, Brent Helt, Amber Lopez Roberts, Randy Neice, Richard Powelson, and Bethann Ritter Snyder. Elizabeth Morris, Terry Richardson, Jennifer Spence, Michael Willems, and John Van Schaik provided additional support.

Related GAO Reports

Emergency Preparedness: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Interagency Assessments and Accountability for Closing Capability Gaps. [GAO-15-20](#). Washington, D.C.: December 4, 2014.

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